

It's all about love 25 October 2020

A long time ago in a Galilee far, far away...well, not exactly, it was at Mount Sinai... anyway, Moses went up to see God and received the 10 Commandments. He actually received them twice. But that's a whole different sermon.

Moses received the Commandments from God and gave them to God's people to live by. They seem fairly straightforward. You shall not murder. That makes sense. You shall not make images or statues of God. Also makes sense. You shall obey your mother and father. Again, yes, basic rules we strive to live by. You shall not lie. You shall not yearn for stuff that isn't yours. Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy. Don't mess around with people that aren't your partner, or somebody else's partner. Don't take stuff that isn't yours. A total of ten commandments that, at first glance, seem pretty straightforward.

And yet, with most things in the bible they were wide open to interpretation. In fact we still disagree about some of those commandments. We shall not lie. Okay, but what if your girlfriend is wearing something very unflattering but you've been waiting an hour for her to get ready and you're going to be late. When she says "What do you think?", what do you say?

Or when a child draws you something that you have NO IDEA what it is. What do you tell him?

Does this apply to ALL lies or are small socially-polite lies acceptable?

And so on.

We have been working our way through Matthew's gospel this year, most recently, Chapter 22. The chapter begins with the Parable of the Wedding Banquet. It is followed by The Question About Paying Taxes, The Question About the Resurrection and then today's Gospel.

The brain trust of the day in Jesus' time tried to trap him into saying the wrong thing. We heard about this a little while ago with the coin and the Emperor. And it continues today. Jesus is asked "What is the greatest commandment?" And Jesus, being a smart man, summarized the laws, the commandments, into two.

"Love the Lord your God with your heart, your soul and your mind. You shall love your neighbour as yourself. One these two commandments hang all the laws and the prophets."

Before I go any further with this section, I want to touch on the next section, called The Question About David's Son. In it Jesus asks the Pharisees, the ones who have been challenging Jesus for the past while, "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They answer that the Messiah is the son of David.

Jesus replies, 'How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'"? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" Jesus just did to the Pharisees what they were trying to do to him! He caught them out in their own game! Take THAT Pharisees!

I like the way the chapter ends. "No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions."

Jesus knew the Hebrew Scriptures. He would have known the lineage described at the end of the book of Ruth. Interestingly, Jesus is from the House of David through both Mary and Joseph's lineage. In the words of the Canadian Prophet Alanis Morissette "Isn't it ironic? Don't you think?"

Now, back to "Love the Lord your God with your heart, your soul and your mind. You shall love your neighbour as yourself. One these two commandments hang all the laws and the prophets."

Love. It seems so simple, and yet, love is complicated. There's the Disney version of love where everything is beautiful and easy. Of course, in Disney there are creatures to do your housework and sewing in the middle of the night.

Love. In Hebrew, as in English, there is only one word for love. (אהב) Ahava

Love. In Greek, there are six words for love.

- Eros, or sexual/passionate love.
- Philia, or deep friendship love
- Ludus, or playful love
- Agape, or love for everyone.
- Pragma, or longstanding love.
- Philautia, or love of self.

Love. In the Bible, there are four kinds of love.

Eros, or romantic love. You can find all kinds of eros love in the Song of Solomon.

Storge, or family love between parents and siblings. You can find this in the stories of Martha, Mary and Lazarus and in Romans 12.10.

Philia, or deep bonds of love through friendship, such as the bonds we have for one another in the Church, as part of the same family. Philia comes from the root word philos which means Beloved.

Agape, is likely the best-known type of love in the Bible. It is the highest form of love, shared from God to all of humanity. It is a kind of love that is deep, pure and unconditional. It's the kind of love we should all ascribe to.

The word love gets thrown around a lot. I hear people talk about loving ice cream, and while I do enjoy it, to say I love it seems to cheapen how I would talk about the love I have for my grandchildren, or my nephews. Do you know what I mean?

Sometimes the English language does not feel as though it has enough nuance, such as with the word love.

When Jesus is talking to the Pharisees, he's talking about agape love. He's not talking about the superficial love that evaporates as soon as things get difficult. He's talking about the deep and dirty, working hard and feeling frustrated, loving someone as much as you love yourself.

It's the kind of love that can make or break a long-term relationship. Inevitably couples will disagree. Knowing there will be disagreements and how to face these disagreements can be the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful marriage.

Now, I'm not suggesting for one moment that a person should stay in a relationship where there is abuse. Or you should stay together in a relationship where both people are deeply unhappy and it would be more merciful for them to separate.

I'm talking about loving your neighbour with your heart, your soul and your mind. Loving the neighbours who don't like you. Loving the neighbours who don't think like or act like you. Loving the neighbours who's political views differ from you.

Remember, we are commanded to love one another, not like one another. We can, and often do love people we don't like. Anyone ever raise a toddler or a teenager?

Agape love is the type of love you roll up your sleeves and dive into. It may get messy. It may make you uncomfortable, but the relationship is important enough, that you will set aside your discomfort and keep trying. Agape love is anything but easy. It's anything but cute. Agape love is about relationship. If you are important to me, then what is important to you is important to me, because you are important to me.

It doesn't mean that I will give up my beliefs if yours are vehemently different than mine. It means that I will listen to you and try to understand you. And sometimes that means I need to walk away for awhile and we agree to disagree. I challenge you with your behaviour or beliefs that make me uncomfortable.

It is not easy, dear God, we know it is not easy to share Agape love. But when we share in an agape meal we are sharing in the very best of Christ. The very best of God. And the very best of ourselves.

Jesus loved all he encountered. But he didn't necessarily like them all. He and Judas, at one time, were the best of friends. Judas betrayed him. Yet Jesus did not stop loving him. Think of your own relationships. Are all of them the same? Do you feel the same way for the barista that pours your coffee as you do for your best friend? Do you feel the same way about the Prime Minister as you do with your children?

For some relationships, agape is not necessary. But for important relationships, agape is necessary. It doesn't mean that you give yourself away in order to avoid conflict, or you never disagree. I fear for relationships that never have disagreements.

What I do know is this. We, as humans, will never be able to express the fullness of agape love because we cannot love as God does. As Jesus does. And that's okay. It doesn't mean we are off the hook for the difficult kinds of love. It means that we try, and try, and try to experience agape love for one another. We try and experience agape love for God. For Jesus and for the Holy Spirit.

And especially, for each other. Love your neighbour as yourself. Even the ones that drive over your garbage cans or play their music too loud on a Saturday night. Love your neighbours that you can see, and those who live thousands of miles away.

Being part of the family of God means we must love as best we can. With our heart, with our soul and with our mind. These three will help guide us as we move through the intricacies of agape love.

Trust in yourself. Trust in your heart, soul and mind.

Love God, above all else, and love your neighbour as yourself.

Amen

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Matthew 22.34-46